
EXODUS 20:1 God spoke all these words, saying,

The preface to the ten commandments, Exo 20:1, Exo 20:2. The First commandment, against mental or theoretic idolatry, Exo 20:3. The Second, against making and worshipping images, or practical idolatry, Exo 20:4-6. The Third, against false swearing, blasphemy, and irreverent use of the name of God, Exo 20:7. The Fourth, against profanation of the Sabbath, and idleness on the other days of the week, Exo 20:8-11. The Fifth, against disrespect and disobedience to parents, Exo 20:12. The Sixth, against murder and cruelty, Exo 20:13. The Seventh, against adultery and uncleanness, Exo 20:14. The Eighth, against stealing and dishonesty, Exo 20:15. The Ninth, against false testimony, perjury, etc., Exo 20:16. The Tenth, against covetousness, Exo 20:17. The people are alarmed at the awful appearance of God on the mount, and stand afar off, Exo 20:18. They pray that Moses may be mediator between God and them, Exo 20:19. Moses encourages them, Exo 20:20. He draws near to the thick darkness, and God communes with him, Exo 20:21, Exo 20:22. Farther directions against idolatry, Exo 20:23. Directions concerning making an altar of earth, Exo 20:24; and an altar of hewn stone, Exo 20:25. None of these to be ascended by steps, and the reason given, Exo 20:26.

Verse 1

All these words - Houbigant supposes, and with great plausibility of reason, that the clause **את כל האלה הדברים האלה** *eth col haddebarim haelleh*, "all these words," belong to the latter part of the concluding verse of Exodus 19, which he thinks should be read thus: And Moses went down unto the people, and spake unto them All These Words; i.e., delivered the solemn charge relative to their not attempting to come up to that part of the mountain on which God manifested himself in his glorious majesty, lest he should break forth upon them and consume them. For how could Divine justice and purity suffer a people so defiled to stand in his immediate presence? When Moses, therefore, had gone down and spoken all these words, and he and Aaron had re-ascended the mount, then the Divine Being, as supreme legislator, is majestically introduced thus: And God spake, saying. This gives a dignity to the commencement of this chapter of which the clause above mentioned, if not referred to the speech of Moses, deprives it. The Anglo-Saxon favors this emendation: God spoke Thus, which is the whole of the first verse as it stands in that version.

Some learned men are of opinion that the Ten Commandments were delivered on May 30, being then the day of pentecost.

The laws delivered on Mount Sinai have been variously named. In Deu 4:13, they are called **עשרת הדברים** *asereth haddebarim*, The Ten Words. In the preceding chapter, Exo 19:5, God calls them **את בריתי** *eth berithi*, my Covenant, i.e., the agreement he entered into with the people of Israel to take them for his peculiar people, if they took him for their God and portion. If ye will obey my voice indeed, and Keep my Covenant, Then shall ye be a peculiar treasure unto me. And the word covenant here evidently refers to the laws given in this chapter, as is evident from Deu 4:13 : And he declared unto you his Covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even Ten Commandments. They have been also termed the moral law, because they contain and lay down rules for the regulation of the manners or conduct of men. Sometimes they have been termed the Law, **התורה** *hattorah*, by way of eminence, as containing the grand system of spiritual instruction, direction, guidance, etc. See on the word Law, Exo 12:49 (note). And frequently the Decalogue, **Δεκαλογος**, which is a literal translation into Greek of the **עשרת הדברים** *asereth haddebarim*, or Ten Words, of Moses.

Among divines they are generally divided into what they term the first and second tables. The First table containing the first, second, third, and fourth commandments, and comprehending the whole system of theology, the true notions we should form of the Divine nature, the reverence we owe and the religious service we should render to him. The Second, containing the six last commandments, and comprehending a complete system of ethics, or moral duties, which man owes to his fellows, and on the due performance of which the order, peace and happiness of society depend. By this division, the First table contains our duty to God; the Second our duty to our Neighbor. This division, which is natural enough, refers us to the grand principle, love to God and love to man, through which both tables are observed.

1. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind, and strength.
2. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

On these two hang all the law and the prophets. See Clarke's note on Mat 22:37. See Clarke's note on Mat 22:38. See Clarke's note on Mat 22:39. See Clarke's note on Mat 22:40.

EXODUS 20:2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Verse 2

I am the Lord thy God - יהוה אלהיך Yehovah eloheycha. On the word Jehovah, which we here translate Lord, see Clarke's note on Gen 2:4, and see Clarke's note on Exo 6:3. And on the word Elohim, here translated God, see Clarke's note on Gen 1:1. It is worthy of remark that each individual is addressed here, and not the people collectively, though they are all necessarily included; that each might feel that he was bound for himself to hear and do all these words. Moses labored to impress this personal interest on the people's minds, when he said, Deu 5:3, Deu 5:4 : "The Lord made this covenant with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day." Brought thee out of the land of Egypt, etc. - And by this very thing have proved myself to be superior to all gods, unlimited in power, and most gracious as well as fearful in operation. This is the preface or introduction, but should not be separated from the commandment. Therefore, -

EXODUS 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

Verse 3

Thou shalt have no other gods before me - אלהים אחרים elohim acherim, no strange gods - none that thou art not acquainted with, none who has not given thee such proofs of his power and godhead as I have done in delivering thee from the Egyptians, dividing the Red Sea, bringing water out of the rock, quails into the desert, manna from heaven to feed thee, and the pillar of cloud to direct, enlighten, and shield thee. By these miracles God had rendered himself familiar to them, they were intimately acquainted with the operation of his hands; and therefore with great propriety he says, Thou shalt have no strange gods before me; על פני al panai, before or in the place of those manifestations which I have made of myself.

This commandment prohibits every species of mental idolatry, and all inordinate attachment to earthly and sensible things. As God is the fountain of happiness, and no intelligent creature can be happy but through him, whoever seeks happiness in the creature is necessarily an idolater; as he puts the creature in the place of the Creator, expecting that from the gratification of his passions, in the use or abuse of earthly things, which is to be found in God alone. The very first commandment of the whole series is divinely calculated to prevent man's misery and promote his happiness, by taking him off from all false dependence, and leading him to God himself, the fountain of all good.

EXODUS 20:4 "You shall not make for yourselves an idol, nor any image of anything that is in the heavens above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:

Verse 4

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image - As the word **לֹפֶסֶת** *pasal* signifies to hew, carve, grave, etc., **פֶּסֶל** *pesel* may here signify any kind of image, either of wood, stone, or metal, on which the axe, the chisel, or the graving tool has been employed. This commandment includes in its prohibitions every species of idolatry known to have been practiced among the Egyptians. The reader will see this the more plainly by consulting the notes on the ten plagues, particularly those on Exodus 12.

Or any likeness, etc. - To know the full spirit and extent of this commandment, this place must be collated with Deu 4:15, etc.: Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves - lest ye corrupt yourselves - and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of Male or Female. All who have even the slightest acquaintance with the ancient history of Egypt, know that Osiris and his wife Isis were supreme divinities among that people.

The likeness of any Beast - **בהמה** *behemah*, such as the ox and the heifer. Among the Egyptians the ox was not only sacred but adored, because they supposed that in one of these animals Osiris took up his residence: hence they always had a living ox, which they supposed to be the habitation of this deity; and they imagined that on the death of one he entered into the body of another, and so on successively. This famous ox-god they called Apis and Mnevis.

The likeness of any winged Fowl - The ibis, or stork, or crane, and hawk, may be here intended, for all these were objects of Egyptian idolatry.

The likeness of any thing that Creepeth - The crocodile, serpents, the scarabeus or beetle, were all objects of their adoration; and Mr. Bryant has rendered it very probable that even the frog itself was a sacred animal, as from its inflation it was emblematic of the prophetic influence, for they supposed that the god inflated or distended the body of the person by whom he gave oracular answers.

The likeness of any Fish - All fish were esteemed sacred animals among the Egyptians. One called Oxurunchus had, according to Strabo, lib. xvii., a temple, and divine honors paid to it. Another fish, called Phagrus, was worshipped at Syene, according to Clemens Alexandrinus in his Cohortatio. And the Lepidotus and eel were objects of their adoration, as we find from Herodotus, lib. ii., cap. 72. In short, oxen, heifers, sheep, goats, lions, dogs, monkeys, and cats; the ibis, the crane, and the hawk; the crocodile, serpents, frogs, flies, and the scarabeus or beetle; the Nile and its fish; the sun, moon, planets, and stars; fire, light, air, darkness, and night, were all objects of Egyptian idolatry, and all included in this very circumstantial prohibition as detailed in Deuteronomy, and very forcibly in the

general terms of the text: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in the Heavens above, or that is in the Earth beneath, or that is in the Water under the earth. And the reason of this becomes self-evident, when the various objects of Egyptian idolatry are considered.

To countenance its image worship, the Roman Catholic Church has left the whole of this second commandment out of the decalogue, and thus lost one whole commandment out of the ten; but to keep up the number they have divided the tenth into two. This is totally contrary to the faith of God's elect and to the acknowledgment of that truth which is according to godliness. The verse is found in every MS. of the Hebrew Pentateuch that has ever yet been discovered. It is in all the ancient versions, Samaritan, Chaldee, Syriac, Septuagint, Vulgate, Coptic, and Arabic; also in the Persian, and in all modern versions. There is not one word of the whole verse wanting in the many hundreds of MSS. collected by Kennicott and De Rossi. This corruption of the word of God by the Roman Catholic Church stamps it, as a false and heretical Church, with the deepest brand of ever-during infamy! This commandment also prohibits every species of external idolatry, as the first does all idolatry that may be called internal or mental. All false worship may be considered of this kind, together with all image worship, and all other superstitious rites and ceremonies. See Clarke's note on Exo 20:23.

EXODUS 20:5 you shall not bow yourself down to them, nor serve them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and on the fourth generation of those who hate me,

Verse 5

Jealous God - This shows in a most expressive manner the love of God to this people. He felt for them as the most affectionate husband could do for his spouse; and was jealous for their fidelity, because he willed their invariable happiness.

Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children - This necessarily implies - if the children walk in the steps of their fathers; for no man can be condemned by Divine justice for a crime of which he was never guilty; see Ezekiel 18. Idolatry is however particularly intended, and visiting sins of this kind refers principally to national judgments. By withdrawing the Divine protection the idolatrous Israelites were delivered up into the hands of their enemies, from whom the gods in whom they had trusted could not deliver them. This God did to the third and fourth generations, i.e., successively; as may be seen in every part of the Jewish history, and particularly in the book of Judges. And this, at last, became the grand and the only effectual and lasting means in his hand of their final deliverance from idolatry; for it is well known that after the Babylonish captivity the Israelites were so completely saved from idolatry, as never more to have disgraced themselves by it as they had formerly done. These national judgments, thus continued from generation to generation, appear to be what are designed by the words in the text, Visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, etc.

EXODUS 20:6 and showing loving kindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Verse 6

And showing mercy unto thousands - Mark; even those who love God and keep his commandments merit nothing from him, and therefore the salvation and blessedness which these enjoy come from the mercy of God: Showing mercy, etc. What a disproportion between the works of justice and mercy! Justice works to the third or fourth, mercy to thousands of generations! The heathen had maxims like these. Theocritus also teaches that the children of the good shall be blessed because of their parents' piety, and that evil shall come upon the offspring of the wicked: - Ευσεβειων παιδεσσι τα λωϊα, δυσσεβειων δ' ου.

Idyll. 26, v. 32.

Upon the children of the righteous fall

The choicest blessings; on the wicked, wo.

That love me, and keep my commandments - It was this that caused Christ to comprise the fulfillment of the whole law in love to God and man; see Clarke's note on Exo 20:1. And as love is the grand principle of obedience, and the only incentive to it, so there can be no obedience without it. It would be more easy even in Egyptian bondage to make brick without straw, than to do the will of God unless his love be shed abroad in the heart of the Holy Spirit. Love, says the apostle, is the fulfilling of the law; Rom 13:10.

EXODUS 20:7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

Verse 7

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain - This precept not only forbids all false oaths, but all common swearing where the name of God is used, or where he is appealed to as a witness of the truth. It also necessarily forbids all light and irreverent mention of God, or any of his attributes; and this the original word *לֹא־שָׁחַח* *lashshav* particularly imports: and we may safely add to all these, that every prayer, ejaculation, etc., that is not accompanied with deep reverence and the genuine spirit of piety, is here condemned also. In how many thousands of instances is this commandment broken in the prayers, whether read or extempore, of inconsiderate, bold, and presumptuous worshippers! And how few are there who do not break it, both in their public and private devotions! How low is piety when we are obliged in order to escape damnation, to pray to God to "pardon the sins of our holy things!" Even heathens thought that the names of their gods should be treated with reverence. Παντως μεν δη καλον επιηδευμα, θεων ονοματα μη χραινειν ραδιως, εχοντα ως εχουσιν ημων εκαστοτε τα πολλα οι πλειστοι καθαροτητος τε και αγνειας τα περι τους θεους. "It is most undoubtedly right not easily to pollute the names of the gods, using them as we do common names; but to watch with purity and holiness all things belonging to the gods."

The Lord will not hold him guiltless, etc. - Whatever the person himself may think or hope, however he may plead in his own behalf, and say he intends no evil, etc.; if he in any of the above ways, or in any other way, takes the name of God in vain, God will not hold him guiltless - he will account him guilty and punish him for it. Is it necessary to say to any truly spiritual mind, that all such interjections as O God! my God! good God! good Heavens! etc., etc., are formal positive breaches of this law? How many who pass for Christians are highly criminal here!

EXODUS 20:8 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Verse 8

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy - See what has been already said on this precept, Gen 2:2, and elsewhere. See Clarke's note on Gen 2:2. As this was the most ancient institution, God calls them to remember it; as if he had said, Do not forget that when I had finished my creation I instituted the Sabbath, and remember why I did so, and for what purposes. The word שבת shabbath signifies rest or cessation from labor; and the sanctification of the seventh day is commanded, as having something representative in it; and so indeed it has, for it typifies the rest which remains for the people of God, and in this light it evidently appears to have been understood by the apostle, Hebrews 4. Because this commandment has not been particularly mentioned in the New Testament as a moral precept binding on all, therefore some have presumptuously inferred that there is no Sabbath under the Christian dispensation. The truth is, the Sabbath is considered as a type: all types are of full force till the thing signified by them takes place; but the thing signified by the Sabbath is that rest in glory which remains for the people of God, therefore the moral obligation of the Sabbath must continue till time be swallowed up in eternity.

EXODUS 20:9 You shall labour six days, and do all your work,

Verse 9

Six days shalt thou labor - Therefore he who idles away time on any of the six days, is as guilty before God as he who works on the Sabbath. No work should be done on the Sabbath that can be done on the preceding days, or can be deferred to the succeeding ones. Works of absolute necessity and mercy are alone excepted. He who works by his servants or cattle is equally guilty as if he worked himself. Hiring out horses, etc., for pleasure or business, going on journeys, paying worldly visits, or taking jaunts on the Lord's day, are breaches of this law. The whole of it should be devoted to the rest of the body and the improvement of the mind. God says he has hallowed it - he has made it sacred and set it apart for the above purposes. It is therefore the most proper day for public religious worship.

EXODUS 20:10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. You shall not do any work in it, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your livestock, nor your stranger who is within your gates;

EXODUS 20:11 for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and made it holy.

EXODUS 20:12 "Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

Verse 12

Honor thy father and thy mother - There is a degree of affectionate respect which is owing to parents, that no person else can properly claim. For a considerable time parents stand as it were in the place of God to their children, and therefore rebellion against their lawful commands has been considered as rebellion against God. This precept therefore prohibits, not only all injurious acts, irreverent and unkind speeches to parents, but enjoins all necessary acts of kindness, filial respect, and obedience. We can scarcely suppose that a man honors his parents who, when they fall weak, blind, or sick, does not exert himself to the uttermost in their support. In such cases God as truly requires the children to provide for their parents, as he required the parents to feed, nourish, support, instruct, and defend the children when they were in the lowest state of helplessness in fancy. See Clarke's note on Gen 48:12. The rabbins say, Honor the Lord with thy substance, Pro 3:9; and, Honor thy father and mother. The Lord is to be honored thus if thou have it; thy father and mother, whether thou have it or not; for if thou have nothing, thou art bound to beg for them. See Ainsworth.

That thy days may be long - This, as the apostle observes, Eph 6:2, is the first commandment to which God has annexed a promise; and therefore we may learn in some measure how important the duty is in the sight of God. In Deu 5:16 it is said, And that it may go well with thee; we may therefore conclude that it will go ill with the disobedient; and there is no doubt that the untimely deaths of many young persons are the judicial consequence of their disobedience to their parents. Most who come to an untimely end are obliged to confess that this, with the breach of the Sabbath, was the principal cause of their ruin. Reader, art thou guilty? Humble thyself therefore before God, and repent. 1. As children are bound to succor their parents, so parents are bound to educate and instruct their children in all useful and necessary knowledge, and not to bring them up either in ignorance or idleness. 2. They should teach their children the fear and knowledge of God, for how can they expect affection or dutiful respect from those who have not the fear of God before their eyes? Those who are best educated are generally the most dutiful. Heathens also inculcated respect to parents. Ουδεν προς θεων τιμιωτερον αγαλμα αν κτησαιμεθα πατρος και προπατορος παρειμενων γηρα, και μη τερω την αυτην δυναμιν εχουσων· ούς ουταν αγαλλη τις, τιμαιο γενηθεν ο θεος. - Πας δη νουν εχων φοβειται και τιμα, γονενων ευχας ειδωσ πολλοις και πολλακις επιτελεις γενομενας.

Plato de Leg., lib. xi., vol. ix, p. 160. Ed. Bipont. "We can obtain no more honorable possession from the gods than fathers and forefathers worn down with age, and mothers who have undergone the same change, whom when we delight, God is pleased with the honor; and every one that is governed by right understanding fears and reverences them, well knowing that the prayers of parents oftentimes, and in many particulars, have received full accomplishment."

EXODUS 20:13 "You shall not murder.

Verse 13

Thou shalt not kill - This commandment, which is general, prohibits murder of every kind.

1. All actions by which the lives of our fellow creatures may be abridged.
2. All wars for extending empire, commerce, etc.

3. All sanguinary laws, by the operation of which the lives of men may be taken away for offenses of comparatively trifling demerit.

4. All bad dispositions which lead men to wish evil to, or meditate mischief against, one another; for, says the Scripture, He that hateth his brother in his heart is a murderer.

5. All want of charity to the helpless and distressed; for he who has it in his power to save the life of another by a timely application of succor, food, raiment, etc., and does not do it, and the life of the person either falls or is abridged on this account, is in the sight of God a murderer. He who neglects to save life is, according to an incontrovertible maxim in law, the same as he who takes it away.

6. All riot and excess, all drunkenness and gluttony, all inactivity and slothfulness, and all superstitious mortifications and self-denials, by which life may be destroyed or shortened; all these are point-blank sins against the sixth commandment.

EXODUS 20:14 "You shall not commit adultery.

Verse 14

Thou shalt not commit adultery - Adultery, as defined by our laws, is of two kinds; double, when between two married persons; single, when one of the parties is married, the other single. One principal part of the criminality of adultery consists in its injustice.

1. It robs a man of his right by taking from him the affection of his wife.

2. It does him a wrong by fathering on him and obliging him to maintain as his own a spurious offspring - a child which is not his. The act itself, and every thing leading to the act, is prohibited by this commandment; for our Lord says, Even he who looks on a woman to lust after her, has already committed adultery with her in his heart. And not only adultery (the unlawful commerce between two married persons) is forbidden here, but also fornication and all kinds of mental and sensual uncleanness. All impure books, songs, paintings, etc., which tend to inflame and debauch the mind, are against this law, as well as another species of impurity, for the account of which the reader is referred to; See Clarke's note on Gen 38:30.

That fornication was included under this command we may gather from St. Matthew, Mat 15:19, where our Savior expresses the sense of the different commandments by a word for each, and mentions them in the order in which they stand; but when he comes to the seventh he uses two words, *μοιχεῖαι πορνεῖαι*, to express its meaning, and then goes on to the eighth, etc.; thus evidently showing that fornication was understood to be comprehended under the command, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." As to the word adultery, *adulterium*, it has probably been derived from the words *ad alterius torum*, to another's bed; for it is going to the bed of another man that constitutes the act and the crime. Adultery often means idolatry in the worship of God.

EXODUS 20:15 "You shall not steal.

Verse 15

Thou shalt not steal - All rapine and theft are forbidden by this precept; as well national and commercial wrongs as petty larceny, highway robberies, and private stealing: even the taking advantage of a seller's or buyer's ignorance, to give the one less and make the other pay more for a commodity than its worth, is a breach of this sacred law. All withholding of rights and doing of wrongs are against the spirit of it. But the word is principally applicable to clandestine stealing, though it may undoubtedly include all political injustice and private wrongs. And consequently all kidnapping, crimping, and slave-dealing are prohibited here, whether practiced by individuals or by the state. Crimes are not lessened in their demerit by the number, or political importance of those who commit them. A state that enacts bad laws is as criminal before God as the individual who breaks good ones.

It has been supposed that under the eighth commandment, injuries done to character, the depriving a man of his reputation or good name, are included, hence those words of one of our poets: -

Good name in man or woman
Is the immediate jewel of their souls.
Who steals my purse steals trash, -
But he that filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.

EXODUS 20:16 "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.

Verse 16

Thou shalt not bear false witness, etc. - Not only false oaths, to deprive a man of his life or of his right, are here prohibited, but all whispering, tale-bearing, slander, and calumny; in a word, whatever is deposed as a truth, which is false in fact, and tends to injure another in his goods, person, or character, is against the spirit and letter of this law. Suppressing the truth when known, by which a person may be defrauded of his property or his good name, or lie under injuries or disabilities which a discovery of the truth would have prevented, is also a crime against this law. He who bears a false testimony against or belies even the devil himself, comes under the curse of this law, because his testimony is false. By the term neighbor any human being is intended, whether he rank among our enemies or friends.

EXODUS 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour's."

Verse 17

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house - wife, etc. - Covet signifies to desire or long after, in order to enjoy as a property the person or thing coveted. He breaks this command who by any means endeavors to deprive a man of his house or farm by taking them over his head, as it is

expressed in some countries; who lusts after his neighbor's wife, and endeavors to ingratiate himself into her affections, and to lessen her husband in her esteem; and who endeavors to possess himself of the servants, cattle, etc., of another in any clandestine or unjustifiable manner. "This is a most excellent moral precept, the observance of which will prevent all public crimes; for he who feels the force of the law that prohibits the inordinate desire of any thing that is the property of another, can never make a breach in the peace of society by an act of wrong to any of even its feeblest members."

EXODUS 20:18 All the people perceived the thunderings, the lightnings, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking. When the people saw it, they trembled, and stayed at a distance.

Verse 18

And all the people saw the thunderings, etc. - They had witnessed all these awful things before, (see Exo 19:16), but here they seem to have been repeated; probably at the end of each command, there was a peal of thunder, a blast of the trumpet, and a gleam of lightning, to impress their hearts the more deeply with a due sense of the Divine Majesty, of the holiness of the law which was now delivered, and of the fearful consequences of disobedience. This had the desired effect; the people were impressed with a deep religious fear and a terror of God's judgments; acknowledged themselves perfectly satisfied with the discoveries God had made of himself; and requested that Moses might be constituted the mediator between God and them, as they were not able to bear these tremendous discoveries of the Divine Majesty. "Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die;" Exo 20:19. This teaches us the absolute necessity of that great Mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus, as no man can come unto the Father but by him.

EXODUS 20:19 They said to Moses, "Speak with us yourself, and we will listen; but don't let God speak with us, lest we die."

EXODUS 20:20 Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid, for God has come to test you, and that his fear may be before you, that you won't sin."

Verse 20

And Moses said - Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces - The maxim contained in this verse is, Fear not, that he may fear - do not fear with such a fear as brings consternation into the soul, and produces nothing but terror and confusion; but fear with that fear which reverence and filial affection inspire, that ye sin not - that, through the love and reverence ye feel to your Maker and Sovereign, ye may abstain from every appearance of evil, lest you should forfeit that love which is to you better than life. He who fears in the first sense can neither love nor obey; he who fears not in the latter sense is sure to fall under the first temptation that may occur. Blessed is the man who thus feareth always.

EXODUS 20:21 The people stayed at a distance, and Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

EXODUS 20:22 The LORD said to Moses, "This is what you shall tell the children of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.'

Verse 22

I have talked with you from heaven - Though God manifested himself by the fire, the lightning, the earthquake, the thick darkness, etc., yet the ten words, or commandments were probably uttered from the higher regions of the air, which would be an additional proof to the people that there was no imposture in this case; for though strange appearances and voices might be counterfeited on earth, as was often, no doubt, done by the magicians of Egypt; yet it would be utterly impossible to represent a voice, in a long continued series of instruction, as proceeding from heaven itself, or the higher regions of the atmosphere. This, with the earthquake and repeated thunders, (see on Exo 20:18 (note)), would put the reality of this whole procedure beyond all doubt; and this enabled Moses, Deu 5:26, to make such an appeal to the people on a fact incontrovertible and of infinite importance, that God had indeed talked with them face to face.

EXODUS 20:23 You shall most certainly not make alongside of me gods of silver, or gods of gold for yourselves.

Verse 23

Ye shall not make with me gods of silver - The expressions here are very remarkable. Before it was said, Ye shall have no other gods Before me, אל פני al panai, Exo 20:3. Here they are commanded, ye shall not make gods of silver or gold אֱתִי itti With me, as emblems or representatives of God, in order, as might be pretended, to keep these displays of his magnificence in memory; on the contrary, he would have only an altar of earth - of plain turf, on which they should offer those sacrifices by which they should commemorate their own guilt and the necessity of an atonement to reconcile themselves to God. See Clarke's note on Exo 20:4.

EXODUS 20:24 You shall make an altar of earth for me, and shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your cattle. In every place where I record my name I will come to you and I will bless you.

Verse 24

Thy burnt-offerings, and thy peace-offerings - The law concerning which was shortly to be given, though sacrifices of this kind were in use from the days of Abel.

In all places where I record my name - Wherever I am worshipped, whether in the open wilderness, at the tabernacle, in the temple, the synagogues, or elsewhere, I will come unto thee and bless thee. These words are precisely the same in signification with those of our Lord, Mat 18:20 : For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. And as it was Jesus who was the angel that spoke to them in the wilderness, Act 7:38, from the same mouth this promise in the law and that in the Gospel proceeded.

EXODUS 20:25 If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of cut stones; for if you lift up your tool on it, you have polluted it.

Verse 25

Thou shalt not build it of hewn stone - Because they were now in a wandering state, and had as yet no fixed residence; and therefore no time should be wasted to rear costly altars, which could not be transported with them, and which they must soon leave. Besides, they must not lavish skill or expense on the construction of an altar; the altar of itself, whether costly or mean, was nothing in the worship; it was only the place on which the victim should be laid, and their mind must be attentively fixed on that God to whom the sacrifice was offered, and on the sacrifice itself, as that appointed by the Lord to make an atonement for their sins.

EXODUS 20:26 Neither shall you go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed to it.'

Verse 26

Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar - The word altar comes from altus, high or elevated, though the Hebrew word מזבח mizbach, from זבח zabach, to slay, kill, etc., signifies merely a place for sacrifice; see Gen 8:20. But the heathens, who imitated the rites of the true God in their idolatrous worship, made their altars very high; whence they derived their name altaria, altars, i.e., very high or elevated places; which they built thus, partly through pride and vain glory, and partly that their gods might the better hear them. Hence also the high places or idolatrous altars so often and so severely condemned in the Holy Scriptures. The heathens made some of their altars excessively high; and some imagine that the pyramids were altars of this kind, and that the inspired writer refers to those in these prohibitions. God therefore ordered his altars to be made,

1. either of simple turf, that there might be no unnecessary expense, which, in their present circumstances, the people could not well afford; and that they might be no incentives to idolatry from their costly or curious structure; or
2. of unhewn stone, that no images of animals or of the celestial bodies might be sculptured on them, as was the case among the idolaters, and especially among the Egyptians, as several of their ancient altars which remain to the present day amply testify; which altars themselves, and the images carved on them, became in process of time incentives to idolatry, and even objects of worship.

In short, God formed every part of his worship so that every thing belonging to it might be as dissimilar as possible from that of the surrounding heathenish nations, and especially the Egyptians, from whose land they had just now departed. This seems to have been the whole design of those statutes on which many commentators have written so largely and learnedly, imagining difficulties where probably there are none. The altars of the tabernacle were of a different kind.

In this and the preceding chapter we have met with some of the most awful displays of the Divine Majesty; manifestations of justice and holiness which have no parallel, and can have none till that

day arrive in which he shall appear in his glory, to judge the quick and the dead. The glory was truly terrible, and to the children of Israel insufferable; and yet how highly privileged to have God himself speaking to them from the midst of the fire, giving them statutes and judgments so righteous, so pure, so holy, and so truly excellent in their operation and their end, that they have been the admiration of all the wise and upright in all countries and ages of the world, where their voice has been heard! Mohammed defied all the poets and literati of Arabia to match the language of the Koran; and for purity, elegance, and dignity it bore away the palm, and remained unrivaled. This indeed was the only advantage which the work derived from its author; for its other excellences it was indebted to Moses and the prophets, to Christ and the apostles; as there is scarcely a pure, consistent, theological notion in it, that has not been borrowed from our sacred books. Moses calls the attention of the people, not to the language in which these Divine laws were given, though that is all that it should be, and every way worthy of its author; compressed yet perspicuous; simple yet dignified; in short, such as God should speak if he wished his creatures to comprehend; but he calls their attention to the purity, righteousness, and usefulness of the grand revelation which they had just received. For what nation, says he, is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as Jehovah our God is, in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day? And that which was the sum of all excellence in the present case was this, that the God who gave these laws dwelt among his people; to him they had continual access, and from him received that power without which obedience so extensive and so holy would have been impossible; and yet not one of these laws exacted more than eternal reason, the nature and fitness of things, the prosperity of the community, and the peace and happiness of the individual, required. The Law is holy, and the Commandment is Holy, Just, and Good.

To show still more clearly the excellence and great utility of the ten commandments, and to correct some mistaken notions concerning them, it may be necessary to make a few additional observations. And

1. It is worthy of remark that there is none of these commandments, nor any part of one, which can fairly be considered as merely ceremonial. All are moral, and consequently of everlasting obligation.
2. When considered merely as to the letter, there is certainly no difficulty in the moral obedience required to them. Let every reader take them up one by one, and ask his conscience before God, which of them he is under a fatal and uncontrollable necessity to break?
3. Though by the incarnation and death of Christ all the ceremonial law which referred to him and his sacrifice is necessarily abrogated, yet, as none of these ten commandments refer to any thing properly ceremonial, therefore they are not abrogated.
4. Though Christ came into the world to redeem them who believe from the curse of the law, he did not redeem them from the necessity of walking in that newness of life which these commandments so strongly inculcate.
5. Though Christ is said to have fulfilled the law for us, yet it is nowhere intimated in the Scripture that he has so fulfilled these Ten Laws, as to exempt us from the necessity and privilege of being no idolaters, swearers, Sabbath-breakers, disobedient and cruel children, murderers, adulterers, thieves, and corrupt witnesses. All these commandments, it is true, he punctually fulfilled himself; and all these he writes on the heart of every soul redeemed by his blood.
6. Do not those who scruple not to insinuate that the proper observation of these laws is impossible in this life, and that every man since the fall does daily break them in thought, word, and deed, bear

false witness against God and his truth? and do they not greatly err, not knowing the Scripture, which teaches the necessity of such obedience, nor the power of God, by which the evil principle of the heart is destroyed, and the law of purity written on the soul? If even the regenerate man, as some have unwarily asserted, does daily break these commands, these ten words, in thought, word, and deed, he may be as bad as Satan for aught we know; for Satan himself cannot transgress in more forms than these, for sin can be committed in no other way, either by bodied or disembodied spirits, than by thought, or word, or deed. Such sayings as these tend to destroy the distinction between good and evil, and leave the infidel and the believer on a par as to their moral state. The people of God should be careful how they use them.

7. It must be granted, and indeed has sufficiently appeared from the preceding exposition of these commandments, that they are not only to be understood in the letter but also in the spirit, and that therefore they may be broken in the heart while outwardly kept inviolate; yet this does not prove that a soul influenced by the grace and spirit of Christ cannot most conscientiously observe them; for the grace of the Gospel not only saves a man from outward but also from inward sin; for, says the heavenly messenger, his name shall be called Jesus, (i.e., Savior), because he shall save, (i.e., Deliver) his people from their sins. Therefore the weakness or corruption of human nature forms no argument here, because the blood of Christ cleanses from all unrighteousness; and he saves to the uttermost all who come unto the Father through him. It is therefore readily granted that no man unassisted and uninfluenced by the grace of Christ can keep these commandments, either in the letter or in the spirit; but he who is truly converted to God, and has Christ dwelling in his heart by faith, can, in the letter and in the spirit, do all these things, Because Christ Strengthens him - Reader, the following is a good prayer, and oftentimes thou hast said it; now learn to pray it: "Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep these laws! Lord, have mercy upon us, and write all these thy laws in our hearts, we beseech thee!" - Com. Service.